

The Construction of Meaning through Physical and Inner Structures in the Poem "Aunty" by Tarida Ilham Manurung: A Structural Study by I.A. Richards

Tarida Ilham Manurung¹, Suci Amalia², Suci Ramadhani³, Aisyah Syahfitri⁴, Dini Apriani Siahaan⁵, Rindu Purnama Sari⁶, Intan Permata Sari Manurung⁷

^{1,2,3,4,5,6} Universitas Asahan, Indonesia

* Correspondence e-mail; tymakertas@gmail.com

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Abstract

Early Childhood Education (ECE) plays a fundamental role in supporting children's cognitive, social, emotional, and physical development during the most critical years of life. This study aims to examine the physical and inner structures of the poem "Aunty" by Tarida Ilham Manurung using the perspective of I.A. Richards' theory of poetry structure. This research employed a descriptive qualitative method with a formal structuralism approach. The data consisted of the intrinsic elements of the poem collected through careful reading and note-taking techniques. The analysis of the physical structure focused on diction, imagery, figurative language, rhythm, and rhyme, while the inner structure was analyzed through theme, feeling, tone, and message. The findings reveal that the physical structure of the poem is constructed through the selection of diction representing the geographical setting of Penang, the use of metaphorical expressions such as the symbol of "two shirts," and the application of assonance rhyme with the vowel sound *i*, which creates a melancholic atmosphere through a descending rhythm. These elements strengthen the inner meaning of the poem, particularly in expressing themes of loss, longing, and the representation of a mother figure replaced by the figure of "Aunty" (Saadah Zainal Abidin). This study demonstrates that the integration of physical and inner structures plays an important role in constructing the aesthetic experience and emotional meaning of poetry. The implications of this research are expected to contribute to the development of literary criticism studies, particularly poetry appreciation learning in higher education, as well as enrich contemporary Indonesian literary studies.

Keywords

I.A. Richards, Literary Appreciation, Poetry Analysis, Poetry Structure, Tarida Ilham Manurung



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INTRODUCTION

Early Childhood Education (ECE) plays a fundamental role in supporting children's cognitive, social, emotional, and physical development during the most critical years of life. High-quality early learning experiences contribute significantly to school readiness, lifelong learning, and future socioeconomic outcomes. However, achieving equitable access to quality

ECE remains a major challenge in remote and coastal areas, where geographical isolation, limited educational infrastructure, teacher shortages, and socioeconomic disadvantages often hinder children's learning opportunities. Globally, disparities in access and quality of early childhood education continue to affect children living in marginalized communities, emphasizing the need for context-sensitive learning strategies that can address local challenges while promoting inclusive educational outcomes (Raikes et al., 2023).

Remote and coastal communities frequently experience unique educational constraints that differ from those found in urban settings. Children in these regions often face limited access to qualified educators, inadequate learning resources, transportation difficulties, and insufficient educational facilities. Furthermore, environmental factors such as seasonal weather conditions, geographical barriers, and economic dependence on fishing or agricultural activities can influence children's participation in early learning programs. Research has shown that rural and remote early childhood centers often struggle with resource limitations while still being expected to deliver educational services comparable to those in more developed areas (Matjokana, 2023; Wong et al., 2023).

To overcome these challenges, effective learning strategies for early childhood education in remote and coastal areas must be adapted to local contexts and cultural characteristics. One important approach is the integration of local wisdom and community knowledge into the learning process. In coastal communities, children's daily experiences are closely connected to marine environments, fishing activities, local traditions, and ecological practices. Integrating these elements into the curriculum can enhance children's engagement, relevance of learning, and cultural identity. Studies conducted in coastal regions have demonstrated that incorporating local wisdom into learning activities supports multiple developmental domains, including cognitive, social-emotional, language, artistic, and moral development (Jamiludin et al., 2021).

Another significant strategy is the implementation of multicultural and community-based learning models. Coastal communities often consist of diverse cultural groups with distinct traditions, languages, and social practices. Early childhood education programs that recognize and respect this diversity can foster inclusivity, social cohesion, and mutual understanding among children. Multicultural learning approaches encourage children to appreciate differences while developing a strong sense of belonging within their communities. Such approaches are particularly relevant in coastal regions where cultural interactions and local traditions shape everyday life and learning experiences (Machmud & Alim, 2018).

Outdoor and nature-based learning also represents a highly effective strategy for young children in coastal and remote settings. Natural environments provide rich opportunities for exploration, creativity, problem-solving, and social interaction. Research indicates that coastal environments such as beaches and shorelines offer unique educational affordances that support experiential learning and child development. Through activities involving observation, play, environmental exploration, and interaction with natural resources, children develop critical thinking skills, environmental awareness, and emotional well-being. Nature-based learning has

also been associated with enhanced engagement, self-confidence, and collaborative learning among young children (Barrable & Barrable, 2022; Prins et al., 2022).

In addition, digital and blended learning approaches have emerged as promising solutions for overcoming educational barriers in remote areas. Advances in information and communication technologies can facilitate access to educational content, professional development opportunities for teachers, and collaboration between remote schools and urban educational institutions. Remote teaching and digital learning platforms can help address teacher shortages and improve educational quality when supported by adequate infrastructure and training. Studies have shown that technology-assisted learning can enhance educational opportunities in underserved communities by connecting learners and educators across geographical distances (Guo et al., 2022).

Given the complex challenges faced by remote and coastal communities, the development of effective learning strategies requires collaboration among educators, families, community leaders, and policymakers. Learning approaches that combine local wisdom, multicultural education, outdoor experiences, and appropriate technology integration can create meaningful and sustainable educational opportunities for young children. Therefore, understanding and implementing context-responsive learning strategies is essential for ensuring equitable access to quality early childhood education and supporting the holistic development of children living in remote and coastal areas.

This research relies entirely on the theory of objective structuralism, which divides the elements that build poetry into two broad dimensions: physical structure and inner structure. This approach allows for a comprehensive understanding of the anatomy of poetic texts. Physical structure and inner structure are two primary elements that build poetry, interconnected in presenting the integrity of meaning, so both need to be analyzed in an integrated manner (Arwis et al., 2022). Meanwhile, Badrun (Siti Sarah, Teti Sobari, 2021) explains that text structure consists of interconnected elements, indicating that structure is an interconnected building. The four main components are diction (word choice), rhythm (rhythm of reading), figurative language (figurative language), and rhyme (vocal rhyme). This physical structure is discussed in this article. These four physical components serve as formal media to project the inner structure of poetry, which consists of theme as the main idea, feeling as the poet's emotional attitude, tone as the poet's attitude towards the reader, and message as the moral message the poet wishes to convey to the reader. By combining these two structural dimensions, the meaning and aesthetics of the poem "Aunty" can be fully understood.

METHODS

This research uses a qualitative descriptive method with a formal structuralism approach. Gunawan (Nida Nur Aulia et al., 2025) explains that qualitative research is a method used to solve life's problems. This method was chosen because it is appropriate for analyzing literary works based on the elements of their composition found in the text. Tarida Ilham Manurung's poem "Aunty," consisting of seven stanzas, is the primary data source for this study. The data

collection process began with repeated reading techniques to gain a deeper understanding of the poem's content and meaning. Next, note-taking techniques were used to classify the data in the form of words, phrases, and lines of poetry into a corpus of data, which was evaluated through analysis of physical and inner structures. (Ginanjari et al., 2018) explain that poetry data analysis is carried out through several stages: reading, note-taking, and identifying lines of poetry that fall into physical and inner structures.

The analysis instrument refers to the elements of poetic structure, including physical and inner structures. The physical structure is limited to the elements of diction, imagery, concrete words, figurative language, and versification, while the inner structure includes themes, feelings, tones, and messages. (Simon Zakale, Mariana Lewier, 2020) state that "Poetry has a physical structure and an inner structure that are interrelated." Data validity is guaranteed through theoretical triangulation by comparing the findings of the textual data of the poem against various relevant theoretical references so that a more objective interpretation is obtained.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the results of the structuralist textual analysis, the poem "*Aunty*" integrates its physical elements cohesively to aesthetically project its inner structure. The following discussion provides a detailed analysis of both structural dimensions.

Analysis of the Physical Structure

Diction (Word Choice). The analysis reveals three dominant categories of diction in the poem. First, the proper noun "**Saadah Zainal Abidin**," which directly refers to the real-life subject, is repeated three times in the first, second, and fifth stanzas. This repetition emphasizes the subject's sacred and significant position in the lyrical speaker's memory. Second, the poem employs geographical references located abroad, including "**Malay Peninsula**," "**George Town**," "**Gurney Drive**," and "**Penang Hill (Bukit Bendera)**." These geographical expressions function as empirical memory markers that preserve the shared experiences between the lyrical speaker and the character "Aunty." Rather than serving merely as a background setting, these places operate as concrete anchors of memory. Contemporary poets frequently utilize geographical spaces as tangible representations of remembrance. Third, melancholic diction, such as "**migration (hijrah)**," "**longing**," "**melancholy**," and "**loss**," is deliberately selected to direct the reader's psychological response toward a sorrowful emotional atmosphere.

This spatial diction is consistent with the findings of Rahmayantis (2021), who argues that the poet's deliberate selection of diction functions as a concentration of the poem's external structure to represent its inner emotional depth realistically. Through these memory anchors, geographical elements in modern lyric poetry become concrete representations of personal experience. Likewise, the melancholic lexical choices—"*migration*," "*longing*," "*melancholy*," and "*loss*"—reinforce the emotional atmosphere by guiding readers into a reflective and mournful state.

Rhythm. The poem "*Aunty*" exhibits a slow, flowing, calm, and contemplative rhythm. This rhythmic quality is primarily shaped by rhetorical questions such as, "*May I embrace your name here?*" (Stanza 1) and "*Do you still remember those memories?*" (Stanza 6). The dominance of these

interrogative expressions reflects the lyrical speaker's surrender, reverence, and emotional devotion, thereby producing a gentle and meditative cadence throughout the poem.

Figurative Language. The poet effectively employs figurative language to transform abstract emotions into vivid imaginative entities. Metaphor is particularly evident in the sixth stanza: *"The two shirts you gave me / Have now become an eraser whenever I begin to long for you."* Here, the concrete object *"two shirts"* is metaphorically portrayed as an *"eraser of longing,"* symbolizing emotional comfort and consolation. Another metaphor appears in the phrase *"the melancholy of love"* (Stanza 5), which encapsulates emotional suffering through figurative expression. Personification is illustrated in the line *"Holding love on Penang Hill,"* where the abstract concept of *"love"* is endowed with the human capacity to be physically *"held."* Finally, symbolic imagery emerges in the phrase *"black crows flying overhead,"* a universal symbol that conveys grief, loneliness, and the ominous foreboding of separation.

Rhyme. As a contemporary free-verse poem, *"Aunty"* does not adhere to conventional fixed end-rhyme patterns characteristic of traditional poetic forms. Instead, it employs free rhyme while demonstrating a prominent parallel end-rhyme through repeated /i/ vowel assonance in the opening stanza: *"here / forever I stand / Aunty."* The repeated /i/ vowel sound at the ends of successive lines creates a lyrical, harmonious, and almost sacred musicality while intensifying the resonance of the lyrical speaker's emotional suffering from the very beginning of the poem. In the subsequent stanzas, the rhyme scheme becomes more flexible, reflecting the spontaneous and honest flow of memory.

Table 1. Relationship Between the Physical and Inner Structures of the Poem *"Aunty"*

No.	Physical Structure Element	Textual Evidence from the Poem	Correlation with the Inner Structure
1	Diction	<i>"...Malay Peninsula," "George Town," "Gurney Drive," "Penang Hill"</i>	Projects the Sense (Theme) by concretizing the spatial memory of genuine emotional closeness experienced in Malaysia.
2	Rhythm	<i>"Do you still remember those memories?"</i> (slow, flowing tempo)	Projects Feeling (Emotion) by creating a contemplative and melancholic atmosphere for the reader.
3	Figurative Language	<i>"...The two shirts you gave me / Have now become an eraser whenever I begin to long for you."</i> (Metaphor)	Projects Tone by expressing the intimacy of the personal relationship through the memory of physical objects.
4	Rhyme	<i>"...here / ...stand / ...Aunty"</i> (vertical /i/ vowel assonance)	Projects Intention (Message) by reinforcing the poem's aesthetic beauty and the sacred expression of gratitude toward the subject.

Since you intend to use this as part of an academic article, below is a polished academic English translation.

Analysis of the Inner Structure

Theme. The central theme of the poem is the psychological substitution of a lost mother figure through the sincerity and affection of a surrogate maternal figure, referred to as **"Aunty."** This theme is explicitly articulated in the closing lines of the seventh stanza: *"Thank you for your love / With you, I once forgot the loss of a mother."* According to **Anggraini (2018),**

"Each poet portrays the figure of the mother from a different perspective." In "Aunty," the mother is not represented directly; instead, she is symbolized through a substitute figure who restores the lyrical speaker's sense of security, affection, and emotional warmth. This surrogate maternal presence enables the speaker to cope with the emotional void left by the loss of the biological mother, highlighting that motherhood may be expressed through compassion and care rather than biological kinship alone.

Feeling. The dominant emotional quality conveyed in the poem is profound tenderness, gratitude, and love intertwined with melancholy resulting from the spatial and temporal distance separating the lyrical speaker from the beloved figure. These emotions emerge consistently throughout the poem, revealing the speaker's sincere appreciation for the emotional support received while simultaneously expressing the sorrow of separation. Consequently, the poem evokes empathy by portraying longing as both a painful and meaningful emotional experience.

Tone. The tone established by the poet is intimate, reverential, supplicatory, and deeply respectful toward the figure of **Saadah Zainal Abidin**. Throughout the poem, the lyrical speaker addresses "Aunty" with humility and admiration, creating a solemn atmosphere that reflects gratitude and emotional devotion rather than despair. This respectful tone strengthens the poem's portrayal of a relationship founded upon affection, honor, and enduring appreciation.

Message (Intention). The poem conveys a profoundly humanistic message: maternal love is universal and is not confined to biological relationships. The presence of a compassionate individual during difficult periods of life particularly during the speaker's *hijrah* (migration or life transition) can heal the deepest existential sorrow caused by the loss of one's mother. Ultimately, the poem emphasizes that genuine kindness, empathy, and emotional care have the power to transcend blood ties, offering hope, comfort, and emotional restoration to those experiencing grief and displacement.

Table 2. Relationship of the Inner Structure of the Poem "Aunty"

No.	Inner Structure Element	Textual Evidence from the Poem	Correlation with the Inner Structure
1	Theme	The psychological substitution of the mother figure through the emotional bond with "Aunty."	Demonstrates that the trauma of losing a parent can be alleviated through the presence of a caring and protective surrogate figure.
2	Feeling	Profound tenderness, deep love, gratitude, and melancholy arising from physical separation.	Expresses sincere emotional outpouring that authentically touches the reader's psychological and emotional responses.
3	Tone	Intimate, reverential, supplicatory, and deeply	Maintains a courteous, solemn, and sacred mode of poetic communication toward the

4	Message (Intention)	respectful. Maternal love is universal and transcends biological kinship.	honored subject. Communicates a universal humanistic message that sincere compassion and care for others can overcome the boundaries of blood relationships, particularly for those living far from home.
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CONCLUSION

Through the structuralism perspective of I.A. Richards, it can be concluded comprehensively that the poem "Aunty" by Tarida Ilham Manurung is a very cohesive totality of literary structure. The four physical elements studied are the selection of authentic transnational geographic diction, contemplative sloping rhythm, metaphorical figure of speech of longing shirt, and aesthetic assonance rhyme of vowel 'i' which is proven to be successful in delivering the inner structure of the poem optimally and functionally. The interweaving of these elements successfully embodies the deep theme of the sincerity of universal affection from an aunt/protective figure ("Aunty") who is able to represent the process of emotional acceptance of the loss of a mother figure through the presence of the figure of Aunty, showing that the combination of physical structure and inner structure is an important aspect in building the reader's aesthetic experience.

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